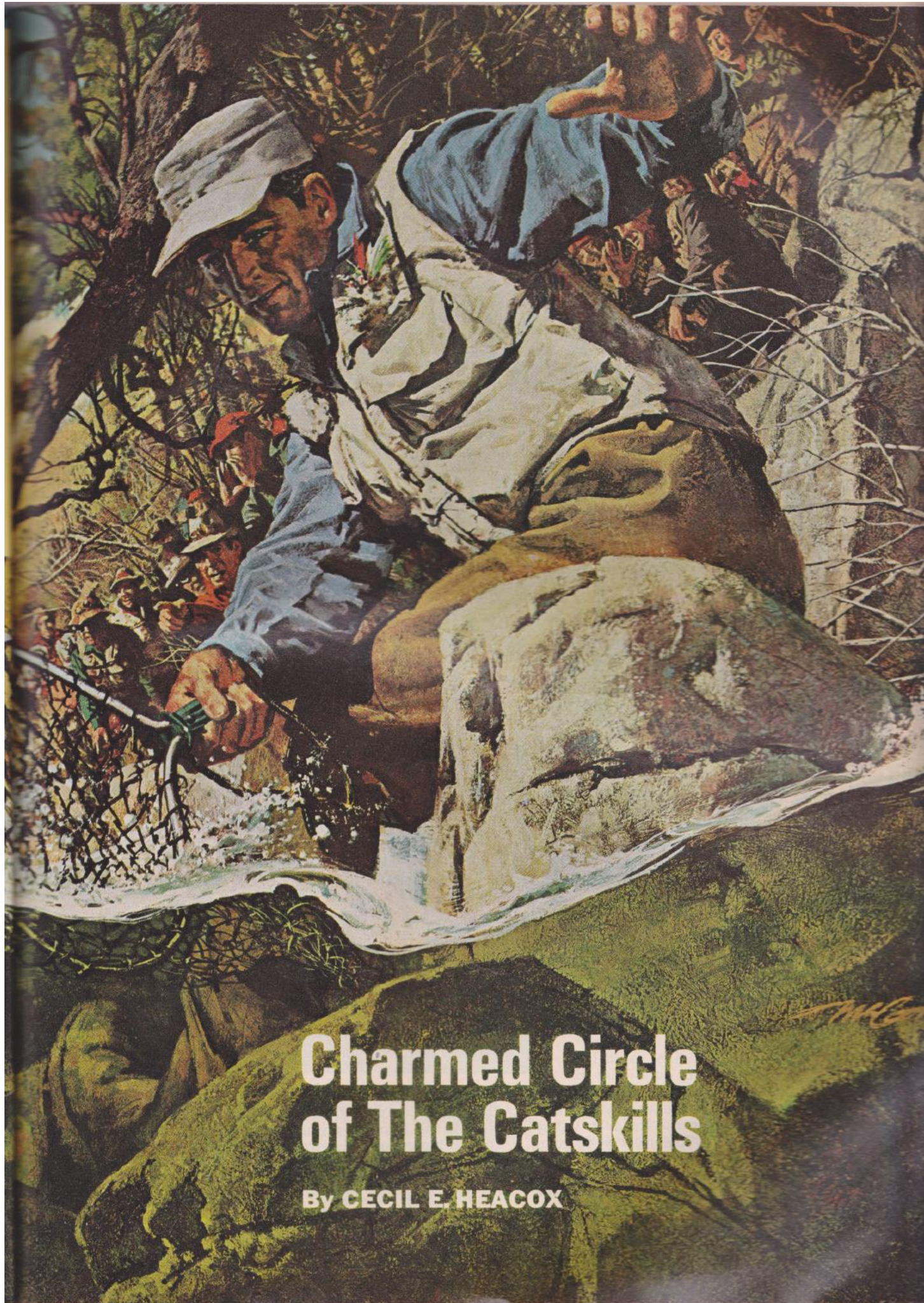




Charmed Circle of The Catskills

By CECIL E. HEACOX

Life on the fabled streams of the Rondout-Esopus-Beaver Kill-Neversink circuit

SONNY, YOU'VE CAUGHT A German brown trout."

The way the big man strode over from the porch of Sheely's Hotel scared me. Maybe catching a "German" trout was against the law; maybe I'd have to put the fish back. A dismal thought to a small boy with pounding heart and bursting pride.

The big fellow was joined by two men who came out of the tap room.

"Mighty nice fish, boy," one of them said, wiping the froth from a handlebar moustache. "Look at that belly—shaped like a shad. Probably go a pound."

I let out my breath with a whoosh.

The year was 1910; the stream, Rondout Creek; the locale, Lackawack, New York. A recent graduate

of "sunfish prep" at nearby Honk Lake, I had just caught my first trout—a milestone in any young angler's life.

What a break for me, starting my fishing career in what I call the Charmed Circle. Within a radius of 50 miles, such celebrated streams as the Esopus, Schoharie, Neversink, Willowemoc, the Beaver Kill, and the East and West branches of the Delaware wind down from Catskill peaks. These topdrawer streams—birthplace of dry-fly fishing in America, bailiwick of talented fly-tyers, and proving grounds for custom-rod makers—have lured fishermen from all corners of the world to the Charmed Circle for more than half a century.

I call this region charmed because its fine fishing in wild, forested set-

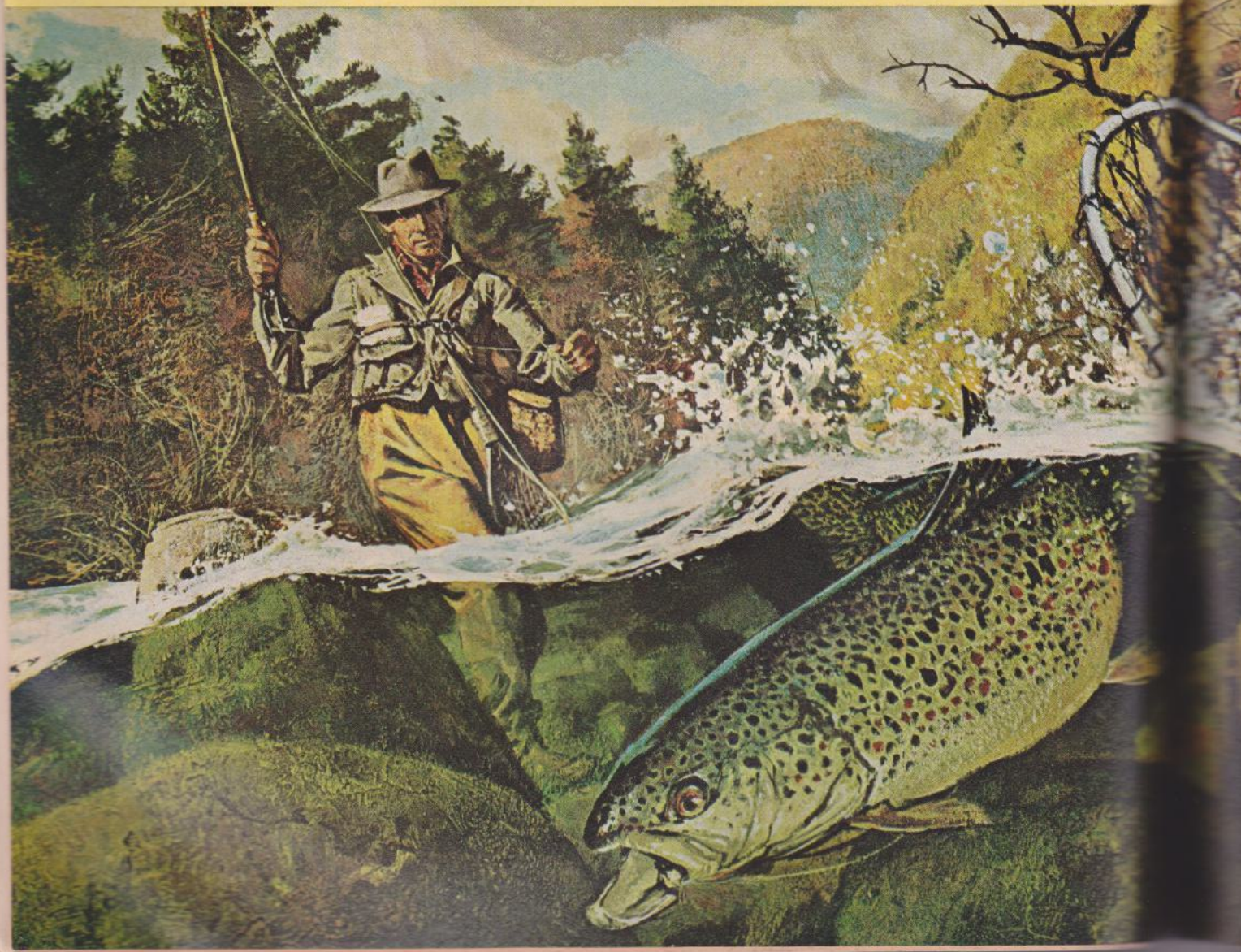
tings has survived even though it is within a day's drive of one-sixth of the total population of the United States and Canada. The Charmed Circle has not only survived in the face of outdoor-hungry hordes, superhighways, floods, hurricanes, New York City's expanding water system, and even U.S. Supreme Court decisions, but it also offers a whole new generation of fishermen a taste of angling as it used to be.

The story of the Charmed Circle is touched with a mystical quality, trademark of the Catskills since the days of Rip Van Winkle. For me, the enchantment began the day I caught that brown trout.

When I was growing up, our family lived at Napanoch on the Rondout, about 75 miles from Manhattan's

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK MCCARTHY

A crowd gathered as Decker played the mammoth brown up and down Mother Pool and the diehard made wild swipes with his net



Charmed Circle of The Catskills

continued



Sketch of southeastern New York's Charmed Circle shows well-known waters, productive tributaries, and stretches of public fishing rights

skyscrapers. My father was a country doctor, and we shared many horse-and-buggy journeys. My favorite trips were up the Rondout Valley. When Father would say, "Tomorrow we're going to Sundown," I would scamper down to Farrington's Livery Stable for a supply of worms. Izaak Walton extolled the virtues of cow-dung worms, but I found that the equine variety were pretty darned good too.

I liked to go along with my father because the mountain folks knew the things that were close to the heart of a young boy. While father treated his patients, I learned to shoot a .22 rifle and set a muskrat trap. And I was let in on the best fishing holes.

"That pole and winder sure work slick as a mink," the boys exclaimed when they saw my "store tackle"—actually my father's Abbey &

Imbrie fly rod and Hawkeye reel, both of which eventually became mine through what lawyers call "adverse possession."

At dinner one day, father said quietly, "We are moving upstate to Auburn next month." This news really shook me. Although I found that the Finger Lakes country opened up new outdoor worlds to me, memories of Catskill trout streams lingered. I had no way of knowing that the Napanoch days were just the first installment in the serial of my attachment to the Charmed Circle.

Some 30 years later, in 1946, the Rondout and all the other famous streams in the Charmed Circle became part of my beat as a fisheries biologist for the New York State Conservation Department. Then I began to find out what made the great streams tick. I measured flows, recorded temperatures, rated riffles and pools, and took readings on fish-food production. In estimating fish populations with an electro-fishing device, I got to know many of the trout by their first names.

I also got to know some of them on the business end of a line. Roy Steenrod—conservation officer, fellow worker, and friend—showed me how to cast a dry fly, and other tricks of the trade. Roy is 86 years young and still eager to talk fishing at the drop of a hackle feather.

During the years I'd spent upstate, a new chapter had been written in the Charmed Circle story. When I left Napanoch, there were no New York City reservoirs west of the Hudson; when I returned, Ashokan and Schoharie had

been in operation for many years, Rondout and Neversink were under construction, and Pepacton and Cannonsville were just coming off the drawing board.

Part of my fascinating job was to make pre-impoundment and post-impoundment studies. I say fascinating not only because of my boyhood memories but also because of the challenges created by the face-lifting changes.

Schoharie Creek was dammed, forming Schoharie Reservoir. Engineering genius reversed the stream's natural flow, sending millions of gallons of water through the Shandaken Tunnel and emptying it into the Esopus at the Allaben Portal. This extra water changed the Esopus from a spritely mountain brook to a brawling, bullying stream.

The Neversink impoundment swallowed up some of the best fishing sections on that stream.

The East Branch, the West Branch, and part of the main Delaware River became Jekyll-Hydes when cold-water releases below the new dams transformed bass habitat into trout environment.

The Beaver Kill and the Willowemoc are now the only major trout streams in the Charmed Circle that remain free-flowing from source to mouth.

As for my first love, the Rondout, a short cast from the spot where I caught my first trout stands the Merriman Dam, which submerged the stream to Lowes Corner.

A pleasant by-product of my job of evaluating the changes was learning all over again where to fish on the Rondout and the other Charmed Circle streams. Fortunately there is still some open water, part of it controlled by New York City. Fishing is allowed on most city-owned waters to holders of permits issued without charge by the New York City Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity at most boroughs and upstate field offices.

On Rondout Creek, though there is some trout fishing just below Merriman Dam, most of the trout water is above the reservoir. In searching out good fishing spots, I found old friends. The late Fred Eck, who had been a patient of my father's, tipped me off to a good stretch.

"You remember where you used to fish across from my place," he told me. "Go downstream a hoot 'n' holler toward the old ball field. If you're kind of careful fishing under those banks, you might tie into a real lunker."

I never found a lunker. Rondout fishing, in fact, is no great shakes these days, but my memories are a powerful magnet that keep me coming back.

Above the hamlet of Sundown, still as unspoiled as when I was a boy, brook trout are dominant. A mile of open water flows through land recently acquired by the state and earmarked for a public campsite. On the state-forest land below Peekamoose is another mile of open water. Here bottom rocks are covered with a (continued on page 88)



Cecil E. Heacox, shown here flyfishing one of his beloved Catskill streams, is a career conservationist who joined the New York State Conservation Department as a fish-hatchery helper and eventually became deputy commissioner, a position from which he recently retired. He is now a natural-resources consultant in Wassaia, New York.

Heacox helped to develop electro-fishing for research purposes. He supervised studies on famous Catherine Creek and extensive tagging experiments in western New York. He also directed a restoration program credited with saving the Chautauqua muskellunge from extinction.

When the Catskills, Heacox's boyhood home and the setting for this story, became his beat, he was instrumental in insuring minimum flows below reservoirs and in securing other benefits for anglers and hunters.

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CHARMED CATSKILLS

(continued from page 53)

lush growth of green algae. I've taken many a spill on those "greased cannonballs," as my field crew called them.

As a fisheries biologist I learned to think in terms of stream systems, not just the main stem. This thinking has paid off. Rondout tributaries that have yielded unexpected dividends to me are Chestnut Creek, west of Grahamsville; Sugarloaf, north from Lowes Corner; the East Branch; and Bear Hole and Stone Cabin brooks on state-forest land.

When I fish the headwaters of the Rondout, I often continue on the road past Peekamoose, dropping down to the Esopus Creek watershed. Off Route 28A, at Five Arch Bridge, a path on New York City property leads to the Chimney Hole, on the Esopus at the head of Ashokan Reservoir. Chimney Hole is a legendary spot where browns and rainbows in the large economy size are frequently taken.

Years ago, when I compiled the Conservation Department's first official list of record New York State fish, I discovered that the biggest brown had come from the Chimney Hole. Caught by T. F. Spenser in 1923, this 19-pound 14-ounce whopper held the record for 31 years and is still a cracker-barrel topic in this neck of the woods.

From the Chimney Hole to the Allaben Portal, the Esopus fluctuates with the needs of thirsty New Yorkers. To fish the stream when the water is running full pipe is to live dangerously.

The Esopus is big-league stuff. It's a favorite of my longtime associate William Goodman, assistant director for law enforcement and field services in the State Conservation Department. Aware of my close bond with the Rondout, Bill ribs me this way: "The Rondout is just a ministream. For sissies. The Esopus separates the men from the boys."

Bill should know—he used to be head of the department's law-enforcement office in that region. To add to his authority, he learned his flyfishing at the knee of George M. La Branche, champion tournament caster, skillful angler, charming gentleman, fascinating writer. La Branche wrote *The Dry Fly* and *Fast Water*, which tells how he adapted English chalk-stream methods to American conditions.

"George was a perfectionist," says Bill. "He'd watch my every cast like a hawk, and if he spotted a sloppy one he'd shout, 'Dammit, I showed you how to do that right last week!'"

The Esopus, because it was more accessible, became the first trout capital of the Charmed Circle. Phoenicia is its nerve center—the place to get the latest piscatorial intelligence.

Phoenicia is also the birthplace of one of the most seductive dry flies. In 1917 Thomas Mills of the New York tackle shop William Mills & Son, established in 1822, was staying at the old Kincaid House with his son Chester and Hiram Leonard, pioneer rod builder.

Stephen Mills, now at the firm's helm,

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How to get hot action on cold days

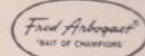


by Dick Kotis
President
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recalls the story this way: "The men were relaxing after a day's fishing, and the talk got around to the new fly patterns. In the middle of the discussion, Tom and Chester left the group. When they came back they had a brand-new fly, the Fanwing Royal Coachman. My father often says that 90 percent of the trout he caught were taken on the Fanwing."

The Esopus was also where the dry-fly rod was born. The time was ripe: here was a great trout stream and here were expert dry-fly fishermen, including the topnotch custom-rod makers Hiram Leonard and Ed and Jim Payne.

Jim Payne and Roy Steenrod, with Roy's inseparable fishing buddies A. E. Hendrickson and George Stevenson, were fishing the Esopus. Roy, blessed with total recall of Charmed Circle happenings, recounts:

"It was back in the spring of 1918. We were on the porch at Susie Winchell's Four Maples at Coldbrook, talking rods and how they should have more pep. A. E. spoke up and said he had a salmon rod that might be right. We tried it, but it was too much rod."

"Then we tried using its second joint and the tip, and we decided that was much better than the rods we were using. Jim Payne said, 'I can make a better rod than that.' And he did. He made a rod for each of us and used different-colored silk on the windings so we could tell them apart. I still have my rod."

Roy remembers that the first rods were nine feet long and weighed about six ounces.

"There was a lot more water in those days," he says, "so a longer rod helped to reach out. And very often we were into rainbows of 18 and 20 inches. Jim made a good many rods after that, changing the action to meet the water, the fish, and the fisherman's ideas. We tried out and used a great number of Payne rods over the years, but we feel quite sure that our talk that day was the real start of a wonderful rod."

The Esopus still offers good fishing in spite of fluctuating flows, droughts, floods, and heavy fishing pressure.

In 1950 the Esopus was hit by a fall hurricane. Bridges were washed out, stream banks cut back, and houses swept away. Pools were filled with shifting gravel, the bottom was scoured, and fish and fish forage were destroyed. And then, six months later, another flood hit the valley. A new record was set at the U.S. Gauging Station at Coldbrook—59,500 cubic feet per second, as contrasted with the stream's minimum flow, 9.3 c.f.s.!

I had 20 years' experience in evaluating stream ecology to back me up, so I did not hesitate to stick my professional neck out and say, "No stream can take this." My crew, fellow fishermen, and favorite bartenders were in agreement that this was the end of the Esopus.

By coincidence, a fisheries survey had been made just prior to the 1950 storm. To get a before-and-after picture, an-

other survey was made the following summer. I was astounded to find insect life already coming back. Electro-fishing checks actually showed an increase in yearling browns and rainbows! No dethroned heavyweight ever made a more spectacular comeback.

A few years later big rainbows and browns were again thrilling Esopus fishermen.

Lawrence Decker, a veteran Esopus angler who favors minnows for bait, is not likely to forget an April day in 1955 on the Mother Pool. For openers, he creeled a 20-inch brown and lost a huge rainbow when the hook pulled out.

He went back to the head of the pool. On the second cast, made at about 2:30, he had a smashing strike. The fish refused to show, but Decker knew he had a big one on. For an hour or so he played the fish up and down the pool, his rod bending almost double.

To add to his problems, a crowd of kibitzing fishermen gathered, making wild swipes with their nets. Eventually, however, all the kibitzers except one diehard retired to the bank, where they were joined by motorists who pulled off nearby Route 28 to watch the show. Decker estimates that 100 people were on the bank.

At 3:30 the trout was just about licked, but the self-appointed netter was still trying vainly to scoop it up. Finally Decker got his own net under the fish—a brown trout that measured 30½ inches and weighed nine pounds 10½ ounces!

Such sensational fishing doesn't happen every day, but it does bring the loyal and hopeful Esopus clan back season after season.

Although flies are in common use there, the Esopus angler is not in disgrace if he uses other lures. That April day, Decker used a live minnow, an ancient and honorable method on this stream. To keep the bait down, Decker attaches seven BB shots. Not six. Not eight. Exactly seven. When the Esopus is running high, spinning lures often raise the success ratio. "Spinner Sanctum," Bill Goodman calls the stream at those times.

When the Portal is discharging heavily, I fish the Esopus above the Portal. Or I work some of these feeders: Woodland Valley, above Phoenicia, where there is a state-owned public campsite; the Chichester or Stony Clove, north from Phoenicia; and the Beaver Kill and Little Beaver Kill. (Those last two streams should not be confused with the streams of the same name in the Delaware watershed.)

Characteristic of the Charmed Circle are the mountain roads leading from one great stream to another. A well-beaten trail of mine is Route 42 out of Shandaken, around the shoulder of Balsam Mountain, and into the Schoharie valley. Schoharie Creek rises in the highlands not far from the Hudson River. After flowing westerly for more than a dozen miles, it turns north at Lexington and heads toward the Mohawk River. At Prattsville, Gilboa Dam

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bottles up the Schoharie, and its flow is reversed and sent through an underground aqueduct to the Esopus.

Route 42 was formerly the shortest way for me to get to Art Flick's West Kill Tavern Club. The Tavern is no more, but Art is—he lives on the streams in the spring and on the mountainsides in the fall when grouse are flying, or later when snowshoe hares are running.

Art is best known as the author of *A Streamside Guide To The Naturals and Their Imitations*. This book, bible not only of Charmed Circle anglers but also of fishermen everywhere, is now a collectors' item.

Not so well known is the major role that Art played in getting public fishing rights on the Schoharie in the 1930's, the first acquired in New York State. Public fishing rights are easements acquired by the Conservation Department through purchase or gift to provide permanent access to streams and fishing privileges. Art was a salesperson for the idea and did much of the legwork in getting the program started. To date, 1,000 miles of rights have been acquired on 76 of the best trout streams in the state.

Art remembers the Schoharie before Gilboa Dam formed Schoharie Reservoir: "It was some stream in those days. Practically a pure culture of trout. Devasego Falls kept the darned bass down where they belonged. But just as soon as the reservoir filled and the falls were swallowed up, the bass really moved in."

To keep more bass from migrating upstream, the Conservation Department built the Barrier Dam at Prattsville. But some bass had already become established above the dam. Art says, "The worst of it is that those bass aren't worth catching. Even after six years they're stunted little runts—none of them over 10 inches."

Art got some action in this matter, too. The department put in special regulations allowing bass of any size and in any number to be taken by angling in the Schoharie and its tributaries above Barrier Dam from April 1 through November 30.

There are about 12 miles of public fishing rights, well marked by roadside signs, in the Schoharie system. Incidentally, public fishing rights, here and elsewhere, are seldom in solid blocks but rather are interspersed with privately owned sections, some of which are posted.

Near the Schoharie's headwaters, close to Rip Van Winkle country, is North Lake State Public Campsite; Devil's Tombstone, another state campsite, is four miles south of Hunter on Route 214. State campsites are good places for fishermen who like to camp out in tents.

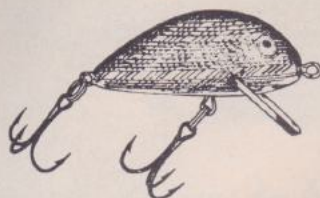
In line with my bent for checking feeders, I've found good Schoharie bets to be: Batavia Kill, East Kill, and Gooseberry.

And Art Flick's pride and joy, the West Kill. With a little nudging from Art, the Conservation Department got

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a large-scale rehabilitation project going there. Result: long sections of rippapping between the villages of West Kill and Lexington to control erosion and stabilize the stream bed.

The willows around Spruceton were planted by Art and his son Bill.

"We had a rule," said Art. "Every time we fished up there, we'd plant a willow."

Oddly enough, I remember the Schoharie for what I didn't catch there. Since the days of Dame Juliana Berners, who wrote the first book on fishing in the English language in 1496, every fisherman has been permitted the luxury of telling a one-that-got-away story. Here is mine.

I was on my favorite stretch of the Schoharie, the boulder section below Mosquito Point. A chilly May rain was falling—not enough to make a roil but enough to tickle things up a bit. I caught and released several nine-inchers. Then I bumbled a cast. The fly struck the top of a boulder, slid off, and disappeared instantly into the huge maw of a real buster. The line throbbed, giving me the unnerving sensation of being attached to an outboard motor.

My wife, who was reading in the car, looked up just as the action started. She jumped out, leaving the door open to the driving rain, and raced across the meadow to lend me a bit of moral support.

A fleeting look told me that the fish was a brown. A real sulker, boring deep to get back to his home under the boulder. A fisherman goes where the fish goes. But what do you do when he doesn't go anywhere?

A quiet pool downstream was a natural place to lead him, but he was not to be led. I got above him, hoping to wear him out, but he was not to be worn out. I tried to horse him to shore, fully intending to give him the coup de grace with a flying tackle.

Just as I was making progress, the hook pulled out.

So it wouldn't be a total loss, I drove a stake into the bank opposite the boulder where the bruiser hung out. I told Art Flick about the stake, hoping that his superior skill would pay off. Art raised the brown once, but that is all the cooperation he got.

In *OUTDOOR LIFE* next month, I'll recount more of the lore of the Charmed Circle and describe my experiences on such streams as the Beaver Kill, Willowemoc, Neversink, and Delaware. THE END

BOWNANZA

(continued from page 77)

dozen carp of up to 12 pounds apiece before all the fish flushed back to the sanctuary of Lake Erie.

The archery gear we were using was uncomplicated. The kind of bow that's used is of little importance. Naturally archers have their individual prefer-

ences. Some like a long bow, others a recurve; some like a heavy draw, others a light one. But any bow drawing 20 pounds or more is suitable for shooting carp.

Bow reels in use today vary greatly. Some are very simple, others rather elaborate. Most bow reels are circular or cylindrical in shape and are mounted on the forepart of the bow. The line is wound onto the reel (which is really a large spool) and then tied to the harpoon arrow. When the arrow is released, the line pulls off the end of the reel without drag (which would deflect the arrow's flight) in the same way that line pulls from an open-face spinning reel when a lure is cast.

Frank Sayers did not use any bow reel at all. He just looped his line over his extended forefinger on the hand holding the bow. The system worked very well, and Frank hit more than his share of targets.

Practically any arrow is good enough for carp shooting. But the toll in broken or lost shafts is likely to be great unless the archer uses steel or fiberglass arrows tipped with harpoon points. Carp can snap wooden arrows like matchsticks.

A bewildering array of harpoon points is available in sporting-goods stores, and most types work fine on carp. Select them according to your own preference, but keep one thing in mind: the point should be easy to detach from both the line and the shaft, since harpoon points usually cannot be pulled out but must be pushed all the way through the fish and then detached.

At noon we anchored the boat in the lee of a rocky shoreline and ate lunch. Then we rounded out the afternoon by working the gravel shorelines of the island. Schools of large carp were cruising almost everywhere, but they were very wary and would veer away and out of range unless we remained perfectly motionless. We found the fish to be much less shy when they approached the entrances to swamps and marshes. These entrances were invariably good places to wait for what Homer called pass-shooting.

Frank made the pass-shooting a little easier with a stepladder he'd brought along. He would set up the ladder in the center of a channel or passageway, perch comfortably on top of it, and clobber each and every carp that approached.

We decided to spend our second day hunting the Ohio mainland shore of Lake Erie, which for millions of sportsmen in the East and Midwest is only a short drive away via turnpike or interstate highway. Here 100 miles of likely shoreline (extending northward into Michigan) and thousands of acres of marshlands provide prime spawning grounds for carp.

We concentrated our hunting at East and Middle harbors—public areas between Port Clinton and Sandusky that are administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. To our great surprise, we found better fishing and bigger fish than we had on the

Catskills Trout Streams
The Charmed Circle
Completed

By CECIL E. HEACOX

THE FAMOUS trout streams of the Charmed Circle of New York's Catskills—Rondout, Esopus, Schoharie, Neversink, Willowemoc, Beaver Kill, and Delaware—have been part of my life since boyhood. Last month (see "Charmed Circle of The Catskills" in *OUTDOOR LIFE* for March) I wrote about the Rondout, where I caught my first trout; the Schoharie, where I didn't catch one; and the Esopus.

Backtracking from the Schoharie on Route 42, I turn onto Route 28 at Shandaken and go to Big Indian. There I take a road that goes through Oliveria and climbs around Slide Mountain, leading me to the headwaters of the West Branch of the Neversink, another Charmed Circle stream.

Near the source of the West Branch, a tributary of the Neversink, the stream is not much more than a trickle. A short stretch here on state-forest land is a good place to introduce a youngster to brook trout. They run small, but there is no size limit on trout in New York State—a sound management measure based on years of research.

The West Branch meets the East Branch of the Neversink at Claryville. There's not much open water on the East Branch, just a short state-forest-land section above Denning. From Claryville down to Neversink Dam, no open water is readily accessible.

The village of Neversink disappeared when Neversink Reservoir filled in 1955. This town was home base at one time for Theodore Gordon, known as the father of dry-fly fishing in America. On one trip with my own father in 1912, I dunked a worm in the Neversink. I often wonder whether the great master might have been on the stream that day.

Gordon was pretty much of a loner. I think my friend Roy Steenrod got about as close to him as anyone did. Roy recounts: "Before I became a game protector—the new title is conservation officer—I worked in the Liberty post office. I got acquainted with Gordon when he came over from Neversink to mail flies to his customers."

Roy visited Gordon regularly. They fished together and tied flies.

"Gordon used a 10-foot (continued on page 175)

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FRANK MCCARTHY

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THE CHARMED CIRCLE

(continued from page 81)

English rod and a light line," Roy recalls. "He didn't cover a stretch the way we do. He was very selective, casting only to certain pockets and riffs. He learned about dry flies from English fishing magazines in which Frederic Halford wrote about introducing dries on the chalk streams. He got some samples from Halford and used them to make patterns for our streams."

During Gordon's last illness, Roy walked the five miles from Liberty twice a week to be at the bedside of his friend. Gordon left the original Halford flies to Roy.

The Neversink nurtured another angling great—Edward R. Hewitt, author of *Telling on The Trout*.

I was never a fair-haired boy with Mr. Hewitt. Apparently I was tarred with the bureaucratic brush (the author worked for the New York Conservation Department in various capacities including deputy commissioner, a position from which he recently retired—Ed. note). Hewitt once wrote: "I am afraid our Conservation Department likes to occupy offices and not take any real responsibility for keeping up the fishing for the public."

My field crews, I think, would challenge that statement. On steamy August days when the going got rough, it was, "Yes sir, Mr. Legree."

Before Mr. Hewitt died we got onto better footing. He hoped to establish salmon in Neversink Reservoir and had salmon eggs flown over from Scotland. I arranged to have them picked up at Idlewild (now Kennedy) Airport and delivered to the state fish hatchery at DeBruce for hatching. Under his explicit instructions the fry were planted as soon as the yolk sac was used up, in gravel sections of the stream above the reservoir. Plantings were made in 1955, '56, and '57, but the finny foreigners haven't shown up yet. I hope that someday an angler will have the thrill of connecting with a Neversink-Hewitt salmon.

The Neversink's West Branch is now home base for The Woman Fly Fishers Club, the only organization of its kind in the world. Founded in 1932, it had its first home on the Willowemoc. Later, for a short time, it was based on the Rondout.

I first met the club's president, Mrs. B. Tappen Fairchild, when my crew was making fish-population counts on the Neversink in 1951. She was intrigued by our electro-fishing device and the way it could bring trout out from deep pockets and undercut banks.

Not long ago I asked Julia Fairchild what flies The Woman Fly Fishers found most effective.

"When the club first came to the Neversink," she replied, "the Fanwing Royal Coachman and Tappen nymph were our favorite flies. Later we turned to Rat-faced McDougals and b-visibilityes."

She reports with pride, "The club now has 75 members, and it's going strong!"

And so, may I add, is "Dame Julia."

Although there are no public fishing rights (easements acquired by the Conservation Department to provide permanent access to streams and fishing privileges) on the Neversink, open water is in good supply: about eight miles between Neversink Reservoir and Fallsburg Dam; three miles below South Fallsburg; and nearly five miles above Godeffroy.

I usually cut over the mountain from the West Branch of the Neversink above Claryville, past Round Pond, to get to the Willowemoc.

Downstream at DeBruce is one of the state's largest fish hatcheries. Whenever I have a poor day, it bucks me up to visit the hatchery and see thousands of trout that are soon to sweeten up fishing in Charmed Circle streams.

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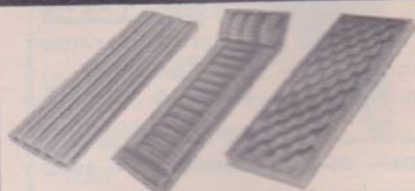
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tion Camp for Boys. The youngsters learn how the work of foresters, game technicians, and fisheries biologists ties into day-to-day living.

Roy Steenrod and I used to share a spot on the program. I gave a talk to the boys on fish management, which went over like an eight-ounce sinker. But their faces lighted up when Roy took over. He showed them how to tie a fly and how to cast. As the payoff, they had the thrill of catching a trout on a fly tied with their own hands.

Roy had a way that inspired youngsters. He was a boyhood hero to Burton Lindsley, local conservation officer.

"Instead of wanting to grow up to be a fireman or a cowboy, I wanted to be a conservation officer," Burt says. "But I never dreamed I would take over Roy's job when he retired."

Burt not only took over Roy's job but also has carried it out in the finest Steenrod tradition.

For me the Willowemoc below DeBruce is a special delight. Offering a relaxed kind of fishing with quiet pools, fast-running riffles, and ample room for backcasts, and posing no great problem with drag, it's instant therapy. The Willowemoc's sharp gradient spills spring flood waters quickly, making it a favorite with early-season anglers. Night fishermen, who put daring above discretion, favor the Willowemoc because of its fairly good footing.

Above and below Livingston Manor is a total of 10 miles of public fishing rights. An interesting feeder, when not reserved for Conservation Camp boys, is Mongaup Creek below the hatchery. Also productive is Fir Brook in the headwaters; and the Little Beaver Kill, a good brown-trout stream, winds from above Parksville to Livingston Manor.

At Roscoe the Willowemoc joins the Beaver Kill at the legendary Junction Pool. The Beaver Kill—fascinating, challenging, exasperating, rewarding—is as much legend as trout stream.

George La Branche, in *The Dry Fly and Fast Water*, wrote about an historic evening's fishing in 1900:

"My first dry fly was cast over the Junction Pool... I 'doctored' a wet fly (a Queen of Waters) into what I thought to be a fair imitation of the dry fly by tying the wings forward... Four fine fish fell to my rod... all within half an hour, and the fly was taken on the first cast each time."

Though all streams in the Charmed Circle have well-known pools, every pool on the Beaver Kill has been honored with a name. A successful Beaver Kill fisherman needs a working knowledge of local geography and a mental map of the pools on the "Big Water": Junction Pool, Ferdons, Barnhardts, Hendricksons, Horse Run, Cairns, Wagon Tracks, Schoolhouse, Lockwoods, Mountain, Lower Mountain, Painter Bend, Cook's Falls, Russell Brook, Cemetery, Barrel, Chiloways, Baxters, Elk Brook Run, Pork Eddy, Peakville, and East Branch.

Even though the day has passed when a 12-inch one-pounder was the hallmark of a Beaver Kill trout, a rou-

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the fisheries biologist's survey of this stream shows flows adequate, water temperatures satisfactory (except in the lower five miles in midsummer), fish forage abundant, and trout-carrying capacity high.

Such a report, however, is only part of the Beaver Kill story. The stream's trout population is dominated by browns, which are surface feeders; the insect population is dominated by mayflies, which are surface floaters. This combination makes the Beaver Kill and the entire Charmed Circle a mecca for dry-fly fishermen and a creative center for fly-tyers. A variety of patterns, tailor-made for these streams, originated with native virtuosos such as Theodore Gordon, Louis Rhead, Herm Christian, Ed Hewitt, the two husband-and-wife teams (Harry and Elsie Darbee and Walt and Winnie Dette), Art Flick, Ray Smith, Ellis Newman, and Roy Steenrod.

Last year, during a bit of armchair fishing, the Darbees, the Dettas, Roy Steenrod, and I ticked off an impressive galaxy of flies that are associated with the Charmed Circle: Beaverkill, Blue Dun Palmer, Bradley Special, Campbell's Fancy, Cahill, Catskill, Christian Special, Conover, Cross Special, Darling's Fancy, Dun Variant, Hendrickson, Irresistible, Neversink, Neversink Skater, McSneek, Mills No. 1, Murray's Favorite, Patton, Petrie's Coachman, Pink Lady, Quack Special, Quill Gordon, and Rat-faced McDougal.

Recently I made a poll of Charmed Circle fly-tyers to check the most popular patterns. Quill Gordon, Light Cahill, and Hendrickson were on everyone's list.

I heard the story of the Hendrickson one day when I was driving along the Beaver Kill with Roy Steenrod. As we passed Ferdons he said, "This is where the Hendrickson was invented. I was fishing with A. E. (Hendrickson) and George Stevenson. A hatch came on, and I'd never seen such a rise. I caught one of the flies and tied some imitations that were as much like the natural as I could make them. The pattern was a killer."

"And it still is," I said.

"A funny thing," Roy added. "We didn't name it then, but a couple of years later A. E. asked me, 'What are you going to call this fly?' I looked at him and said, 'The fly is a Hendrickson,' and I could see that pleased A. E."

Harry Darbee finds that there's a trend to smaller artificials. He says, "Elsie and I get lots of orders for No. 18's, 22's, 24's—even 28's, which we decline to tie. There seem to be more hatches of gnats and the smaller flies that have several generations each season."

"It seems to me," Walt Dette says, "that the hatches of the big mayflies were more predictable fifteen or twenty years ago. When the Green Drake was on the water, you knew that the Yellow May and Coffin Fly would follow on schedule. We could alert New York City fishermen on Thursday that all systems were go, and there would sure-

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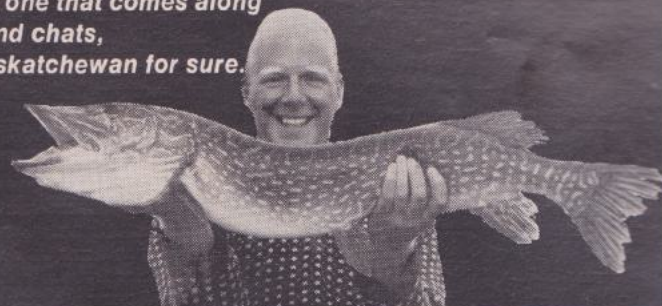


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ly be a hatch on over the weekend."

From Junction Pool to the Beaver Kill's confluence with the East Branch of the Delaware, there are 15 miles of public fishing rights. This is rugged fishing, a challenge even to the expert; veterans, wary of the Beaver Kill's muscular current, use a wading staff. Trout Brook, a tributary entering at Peakville, has three miles of rights.

The lower Beaver Kill, due to high summer water temperatures, has been invaded by smallmouth bass moving out of the colder water of the Delaware. On the Beaver Kill and tributaries, as on the Schoharie, there is no catch or size limit on bass from April 1 to November 30.

A Special Fishing Area has been marked off on the Beaver Kill from Sullivan County line downstream for two miles. Designed to encourage quality angling, fishing there is strictly for fun, and trout must be released.

The Beaver Kill and the Willowemoc escaped reservoir construction but are being disturbed by the reconstruction of Route 17. It will take several years before the scars heal.

Above the Junction Pool where fishing is recreation rather than an endurance contest, there are two miles of public fishing rights. There is another mile of open water a little farther upstream, at Beaver Kill State Campsite.

The campsite stretch, to me, is the best open water on the Beaver Kill. I save it until last—it is one of those perfect settings in which it's pure pleasure to watch a fly thread a current even if the trout aren't rising.

I hesitate to mention my own orthodox type of fly fishing, for fear of being drummed out of the lodge. In the first place, I can't handle much line. The late Ellis Newman tried to make me a respected member of the Establishment. At such widely separated sites as Lake Park, Florida, and Turnwood, New York, I was given intensive instruction in the double haul. But, just as I never could learn to rub my head and pat my belly at the same time when I was a kid, I couldn't seem to master the technique of the long cast.

To limber up my casting arm, I start advertising for customers with a No. 10 White Wulff or Rat-faced McDougal. Since all my Charmed Circle fishing is done in May and June, when fly fishing on Catskills streams is at its peak, I usually start catching fish right away and keep on without changing the fly. But when all I get are investigative swirls, I change to a No. 14 or No. 16 Quill Gordon or Hendrickson. When they fail, I head for a tavern.

A few miles above the Beaver Kill Campsite, Barkaboom Road, another scenic mountain road, swings over to Pepacton Reservoir and the East Branch of the Delaware.

Both Pepacton Reservoir on the East Branch and Cannonsville Reservoir on the West Branch of the Delaware release cold water from the bottom layer of the impoundments. As a result, both branches and part of the main Delaware below the dams have developed

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split personalities. Cold-water discharges have made the environment, formerly dominated by bass, more favorable for trout. But during droughts and heat waves, bass still show up.

On the West Branch of the Delaware above Cannonsville Reservoir, there are 39 miles of public fishing rights. A tributary, the Little Delaware, entering the West Branch below Delhi, has five miles of public fishing rights.

On the East Branch of the Delaware below Pepacton Reservoir, there are five miles of rights and more than 25 miles of unposted water; above the reservoir are 16 unposted miles.

Trout-population counts made by electro-fishing showed the East Branch of the Delaware to be one of the most productive streams in the Charmed Circle. Near its headwaters lies the village of Roxbury, birthplace and boyhood home of naturalist John Burroughs, who returned to Roxbury to spend the last years of his life at Woodchuck Lodge on nearby Old Clump Mountain. Burroughs was to the Cat-skills' Charmed Circle what Thoreau was to Walden Pond.

Tributaries to explore on the East Branch of the Delaware and which have open water are Batavia Kill and Tremper Kill—and the Bush Kill between Fleischmanns and Arkville, where there is about a mile of rights.

Below Hancock the main stem of the Delaware River is laced with numerous tributaries. Where the tributaries join the river are hotspots for big browns and rainbows. For years Basket Brook Pool has held a reputation as a lode hole.

Delaware River tributaries with open water include Beaver Brook, Halfway Brook, Ten Mile River, and Callicoon Creek.

Callicoon Creek was a favorite of George La Branche. And Edward R. Hewitt told a story about the Callicoon that starred Dan Cahill, originator of the Cahill fly.

Cahill, a brakeman on the Erie Railroad in the 1880's, was on a train delayed by a wreck. In the baggage car were several cans of large rainbow trout. Cahill was having difficulty in keeping fresh water in the cans. Certain that the fish could not survive a long delay, he persuaded a couple of fellow trainmen to carry the cans the mile or so to Callicoon Creek. By the turn of the century Callicoon Creek was famous for its rainbow fishing.

Later, fishing in Callicoon went into the doldrums. Although I haven't heard of any train wrecks in the vicinity lately, Callicoon fishing made an unexplained comeback last season.

The Delaware River adds a new sequence to the Charmed Circle saga, one in which the United States Supreme Court plays a big part. When New York City first planned to use the New York State section of the Delaware River for water supply, New Jersey and Pennsylvania protested. Their objections led to a Supreme Court case.

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Map shows Charmed Circle's main streams, tributaries, public fishing rights

New York City to draw a limited amount of water and at the same time required that a specified flow be maintained in the river below New York State, Chief Justice Holmes said, "A river is more than an amenity; it is a treasure. It offers a necessity of life that must be rationed among those who have power over it."

Realizing that the situation was dynamic and fluid, the court retained jurisdiction of the case.

The City started work on Neversink and Pepacton reservoirs, but since the need for additional water continued, plans were made to build a reservoir at Cannonsville on the West Branch of the Delaware. The case again went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The court in 1954 allowed an increase in the amount of water that the city could draw, but it also provided for an increased minimum flow in the Delaware River—the amount to be measured at a U.S. Geological Survey gauging station at Montague, New Jersey, about 10 miles below the New York State line.

What the Supreme Court didn't spell out was a provision for minimum flows below each reservoir. So it would have been possible for New York City to satisfy the Montague requirement by releasing water from just one reservoir, to the detriment of fish life in the streams below the other reservoirs.

This shortcoming was corrected in the Cannonsville Reservoir case, in which Conservation Department officials and fishermen testified. The State

Water Power and Control Commission decided to establish a minimum flow below Cannonsville Reservoir. Later a retroactive agreement, between the Conservation Department and New York City, established minimum flows below all Delaware-system reservoirs.

As the department's principal negotiator in a situation without precedent, I had the satisfaction not only of pioneering but also of improving conditions on the streams that have been so much a part of my life.

As an administrator and a fisherman, I have observed flows in the Delaware-system reservoirs for more than 20 years. In my opinion, the minimum flows now in effect should be increased. Though the flows are adequate to protect fish life they are not sufficient over long periods of time to provide quality fishing—another priceless amenity.

The hope for increases in the existing minimum flows lies, in my opinion, with the Delaware River Basin Commission, a relatively new federal-interstate agency charged with comprehensive planning, development, and management of water and other natural resources of the Delaware River Basin.

These continuing controversies and happenings show that more chapters are to be written in the Charmed Circle story. I look forward to the next episode in the struggle to maintain trout fishing in its best tradition. For the Charmed Circle of the Catskills has me hooked—just as surely as I was hooked by that first trout I caught in the Rondout.

THE END

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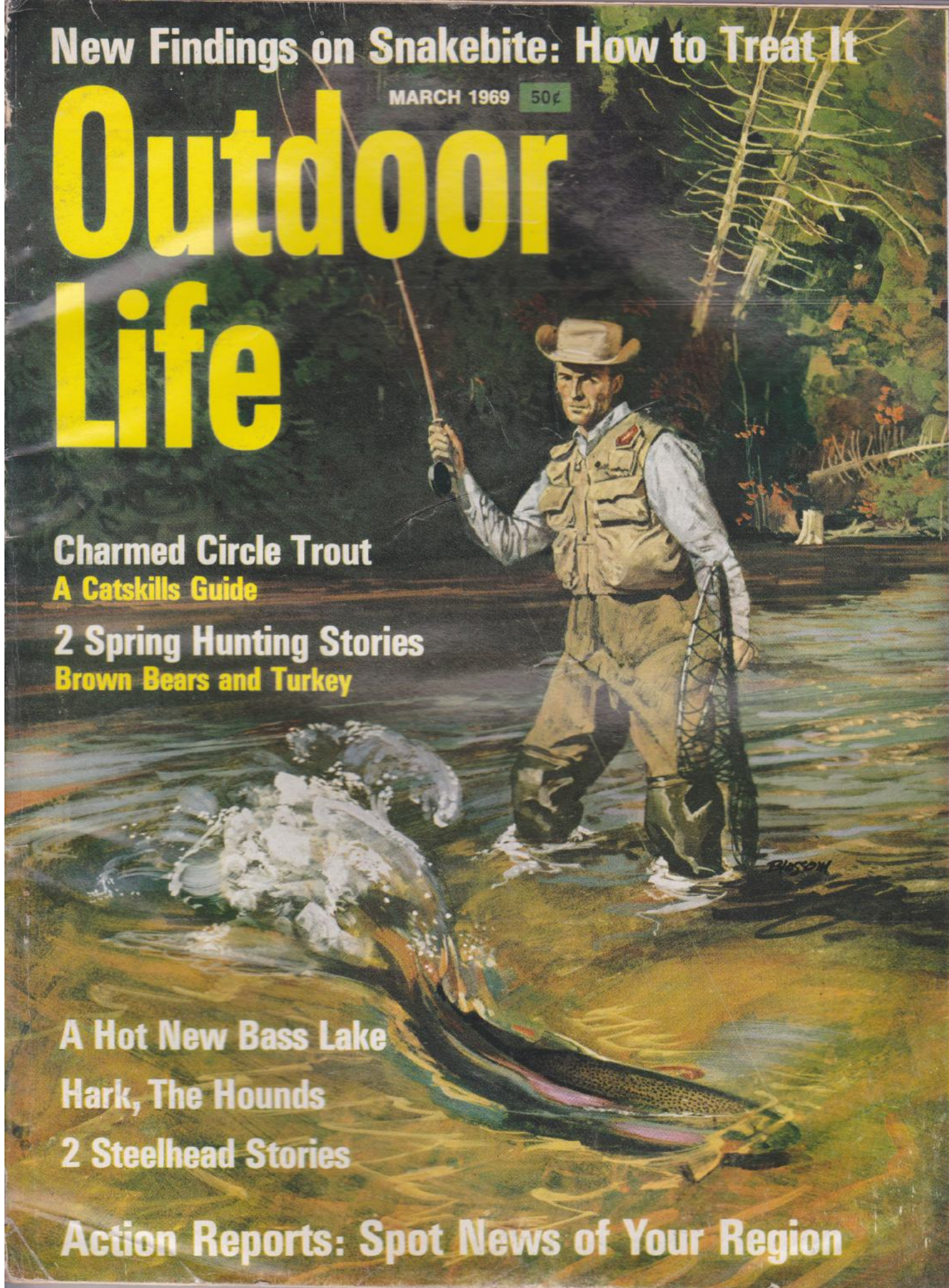
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